

Plant-based diets score big for healthy weight loss

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(HealthDay)—If you've resolved to eat healthy and lose weight in 2017,

a new report suggests the DASH diet may be your best bet.

For the seventh year in a row, *U.S. News & World Report* has named the plant-based eating plan as the best choice overall, followed by the Mediterranean [diet](#), up from fourth place last year. DASH stands for Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension, but its benefits go beyond preventing [high blood pressure](#), the report found.

The DASH and the Mediterranean diets, as well as most of the other recommended diets, focus on eating whole grains, fruits, vegetables, low- or no-fat dairy, lean meats, poultry and fish. They also recommend nuts, seeds and legumes (beans).

But these diets limit or exclude most fats and sweets, and recommend modest portions, according to Dr. David Katz. He is president of the American College of Lifestyle Medicine and a member of the expert panel that came up with the rankings.

"Overall, the diets are similar, and that's what makes this reasonable, because there is really no one diet that's best. But the question is what approach to eating well is going to work for any individual, and that's the benefit of this report," he added.

"You can pick the diet that will work for you and your family. The best diet is one that you are actually able to stick to," Katz noted.

The MIND diet, which incorporates elements of the DASH and Mediterranean diets and is touted as a way to keep Alzheimer's disease at bay, was ranked third in effectiveness.

There was a four-way tie for fourth place between the Flexitarian diet, a "casual vegetarian" diet that allows some poultry and fish; the Mayo Clinic Diet, an eating plan to keep you healthy and trim; the TLC diet, a

plan that cuts cholesterol and fat by eliminating meats, dairy and fried food; and Weight Watchers, which helps you shed excess pounds.

To come up with its list, *U.S. News & World Report* ranked 38 diet plans in nine categories. The rankings were done by an expert panel of nutritionists, dietary consultants, and doctors specializing in diabetes, heart health and weight loss.

Each panelist considered the 38 diets across a number of areas, including the likelihood of sticking to the diet, the odds of losing weight in the short- and long-term, and effectiveness against heart disease and diabetes.

One reason the DASH diet came in first is that it was developed and tested by the U.S. National Institutes of Health, Katz said.

"The evidence for DASH is stronger than it is for some of the other diets, and it includes foods that are familiar to most Americans and can work for real families in the real world," he said.

The U.S. National Institutes of Health agreed.

"DASH is not a fad diet, but a healthy eating plan that supports long-term lifestyle changes," the agency said in a statement Wednesday. "To receive top ratings, a diet has to be relatively easy to follow, nutritious, safe, effective for weight loss, and protective against diabetes and heart disease."

Following the portion size recommended in each diet will usually result in healthy [weight loss](#), Katz explained. "Eating well will help you be leaner and healthier," he said.

In addition to a healthy diet, exercise is necessary for good health, he

said.

"Food is the fuel for the body—it's crucial for your health over a lifetime. But combining it with exercise is also crucial," Katz said. "You are never going to be as healthy as you could be if routine physical activity is not a part of your life."

One nutrition expert said the key to healthy eating and losing weight is in lifestyles and dietary patterns, not crash diets.

"It is a waste of time for people to go on a 'diet,' which is usually a temporary, restrictive, unrealistic, and even unhealthy, way to lose weight," said Samantha Heller. She is an exercise physiologist and senior clinical nutritionist at NYU Langone Medical Center in New York City, and was not a member of the [expert panel](#).

"Think about it—millions of people are spending millions of dollars on fad diets, products and programs, and obesity is still a crisis. The only way to reach a healthy weight and stay there is to create patterns of eating that you can maintain for a lifetime, remembering, too, that being healthy outweighs being skinny," Heller said.

The research is clear that more plant-based diets like the DASH, Mediterranean and vegetarian approaches offer health benefits, including reduced risk of [heart disease](#), dementia, cancer, type 2 diabetes and obesity, she said.

"Skipping the newest fad diet will save you money, time and frustration," Heller said. "Take time to adopt new ideas, such as having meatless meals like a hearty vegetable and bean soup, pasta with roasted red pepper sauce, or peanut butter and apple slices. Keep a daily food record on an app or in a notebook. Seek support and guidance from qualified practitioners such as registered dietitians," she advised.

More information: Visit [U.S. News & World Report](#) for more on the rankings.

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